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ABSTRACT

A 3-day retreat on rural education leadership in Alaska focused on how the Alaska Department of Education, the University of Alaska, rural communities, and school districts can better cooperate to address the long-term educational needs of rural communities. Recommendations were formulated in three focal areas. First, developing an Alaskan rural education action plan for the next 20 years involves adopting standards for culturally responsive schools; defining and achieving local control; developing a clearinghouse to network reform initiatives; engaging elders, families, and communities; stabilizing the rural workforce with a viable economic base; keeping village schools open, regardless of size; and reviewing and revising content standards to insure they address the needs of all Alaska students and communities. Second, developing a rural teacher preparation action plan for HEA, Title II funds includes designating the regional Native Educators Associations as key players in shaping rural teacher education initiatives, increasing the number of Alaska Native teachers and administrators in rural schools, supporting aides and associate teachers who aspire to be licensed teachers, paying interns to teach under the supervision of mentors, providing cultural orientation for new teachers, creating a cross-cultural specialist endorsement for teachers, and assuring funding for research. Third, developing an agenda for a statewide conference on rural education includes showcasing promising reform initiatives, inviting all stakeholders, and producing a video of the proceedings. (TD)

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Sharing Our Pathways

A newsletter of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative

VOL 4, ISSUE 2
Mar/Apr 1999

Alaska Federation of Natives ♦ University of Alaska ♦ National Science Foundation ♦ Annenberg Rural Challenge

Rural Education Looks to a Bright Future in the New Millennium

A Report on the Alaska Rural Education Leadership Retreat

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Alaska Native Knowledge Network

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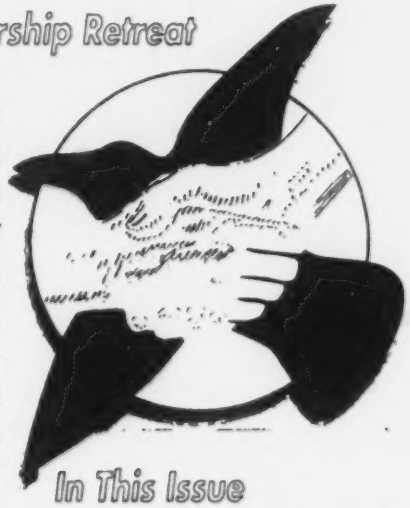
Rural Education Looks to a Bright Future in the New Millennium

A Report on the Alaska Rural Education Leadership Retreat

On January 25–27, over 60 leaders in rural education from across the state gathered in Wasilla for an Alaska Rural Education Leadership Retreat sponsored by the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Education and the Alaska Federation of Natives. Along with Commissioner Shirley Holloway, AFN President Julie Kitka and UA President Mark Hamilton, a group of superintendents, Elders, Native educators and others actively involved in rural education initiatives associated with the Alaska RSI, spent three days reviewing current issues impacting schools in rural Alaska.



Given the many new state mandates, school reform initiatives and ongoing challenges that rural school districts are grappling with as we enter the final year of this millennium, it seemed an opportune time to step back and reflect on where we are and where we want to go with rural education. The focus of the retreat was to take a look at how education programs and services can best be positioned to address the long-term needs of rural communities in this time of limited resources. We were particularly interested in examining ways in which the Alaska Department of Education, the University of Alaska, rural communities and school districts can work more closely together in the provision of basic education services, as well as in staff development, curriculum enhancement, collaborative research and technical assistance. Reports and discussions focused on the following current programs and initiatives:

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- ✗ Alaska Native Student Learning Action Plan—Bernice Tetpon
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- ✗ UA Rural Education Initiatives—Mark Hamilton/Nanne Myers
- ✗ Citizens for the Educational Advancement of Alaska's Children—Ed Gonion
- ✗ Survey of Alaska High School Students—Carole Seyfrit

Following status reports on the various initiatives, the participants turned their attention to developing draft "action plans" around three focal areas. Following is a summary of the recommendations put forward for follow-up actions in each of the focal areas:

Develop an Alaska Rural Education Action Plan for the Next Millennium

This group addressed issues raised in the earlier discussions and developed a preliminary outline of where we would like to be with rural education in Alaska by the year 2020, and some of the steps that will need to be taken to get us there. Recommendations of this group included:

1. Encourage all educational organizations in the state to adopt and implement the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools.
2. Develop a clear definition of "local control" and identify the bureaucratic roadblocks that need to be eliminated and the support systems that need to be in place to achieve it.
3. Develop a clearinghouse to network and synergize all the reform initiatives impacting rural Alaska.
4. Encourage interagency cooperation in addressing the unique needs of rural Alaska.
5. Foster partnerships with colleges to insure the quality of the high school diploma and what it means.
6. Engage Elders, families, parents, homes and communities as critical components in the educational future of rural Alaska.
7. Stabilize the work force with a viable economic base in rural Alaska, with support from private business, corporations, government, etc.
8. Keep the villages alive by keeping the schools open through multiple forms of educational delivery, regardless of size.
9. Develop a strong, well-articulated vision and definition of community, education, schooling and local control as they relate to rural community health and well-being.
10. Insure equity and adequacy in the future of education for rural Alaska, so as to provide equal lifetime opportunities for all Alaskan children and communities.
11. Build on the successes of what we are doing well and continue those efforts.

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12. Continue ongoing review and revision of the content standards to insure they address the needs of all students and communities in Alaska.

Develop a Rural Teacher Preparation Action Plan for MEA, Title II Funds

This group addressed issues associated with the preparation of teachers for schools in rural Alaska and developed a preliminary outline of components for a cooperative proposal for funding a comprehensive statewide rural teacher preparation initiative for rural Alaska. Recommendations of this group included:

1. Designate the regional Native Educators Associations as key players in shaping and governing rural teacher education initiatives, including those of the DOE and the university.
2. Take all steps necessary to increase the number of Alaska Native teachers and administrators in rural schools, including increased support for the Rural Educator Preparation Partnership and Native Administrators for Rural Alaska.
3. Establish school district career ladders to provide incentives and support for aides and associate teachers who are aspiring to be licensed teachers.
4. Provide an option for school districts to employ teacher interns at a partial salary to serve as classroom teachers during their internship year under the supervision of a nearby mentor teacher.
5. Provide incentives for school districts to implement cultural orientation programs (including an extended camp experience) for new teachers as part of their annual inservice plan submitted to DOE.
6. Make available a "cross-cultural specialist" endorsement for teachers, built around the criteria outlined in the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools.
7. Allocate .5% of the annual appropriation for education to be made available for research, evaluation and data tracking regarding issues critical to education in Alaska.
8. Develop and disseminate a set of "Guidelines for Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers" aimed at the preparation of teachers qualified to implement the Alaska Cultural Standards.
9. Implement "Future Teacher Clubs" in all schools in Alaska.

Develop an Agenda for a Statewide Conference on Rural Education in 2000

This group reviewed the current status of school and curricular reform initiatives in rural Alaska and mapped out the parameters for a statewide conference on rural education in 2000 that showcases the most promising curriculum models/materials and teaching/schooling practices leading us into the new millennium. Recommendations of this group included:

1. **Purposes of conference:** review status of school and current reform initiatives in rural Alaska, showcasing promising models based on school curriculum reform; provide participants with strategies to apply/adapt practices in their schools; and develop support network to continue work on conference tasks.
2. **Who participates:** representative team from regions, communities, districts/schools—all stakeholders, including parents (PTA, IEA Comm), students (FTA), policy makers (AASB, legislature, tribal councils, IRA), practitioners (teachers/associate teachers, aides), Elders/young Elders, Native Educator Associations, higher education (teacher educators, REPP, NARA), administrators (ACSA) and media.
3. **Substance:** extend learning beyond classroom walls; partnership theme—open access to education; assessment—practices for success; consolidation/closure; technology & distance education; transition beyond high school; adapting curriculum to cultural and physical regions—place; healthy community and family; barriers to achievement; role models; and student, parent and community involvement in school change.
4. **When and where:** January–March 2000, early spring, possibly in place of BMEEC & NEC, or regionally in 1999 and Anchorage in 2000.
5. **Outcomes:** edit and broadcast one-hour video; document and distribute "proceedings"; send participants back with DVD for immediate use with students; and incorporate teacher/student produced products for dissemination.

The recommendations outlined above are preliminary ideas for developing more detailed action plans in each of the three focal areas listed. We wish to express appreciation to all the participants in the Alaska Rural Education Leadership Retreat for contributing their valuable time and insights to this effort. We invite everyone with an interest in these issues to offer additional ideas and suggestions for how the action plans can be further strengthened so that we can move into the next millennium with a bright future for education in rural Alaska.